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Letters to The Times

Moral Issue of Overflights

TO THE EDITOR:

I should like to support the opinions of Otto Nathan, Prof. Henry Steele Commager and other correspondents who view with sadness the effort of our great newspaper to justify, on the ground of need, the continuance of reconnaissance flights over the soil of Cuba.

It has been pointed out that we do not need these flights in order to secure our safety. It has been pointed out in addition that they are clearly in violation of international law, a proposition that is beyond dispute. It remains to be said that they violate the most elemental of moral principles and stray uncomfortably far from the canons of justice and fair play that we expect The New York Times to uphold.

The moral issue is a simple one. If we claim for ourselves the right to keep Cuba under air surveillance we can do no less than to concede to Cuba the right to maintain a similar surveillance over us. Is there anyone who would deny that the danger of an American invasion of Cuba is very much greater than that of a Cuban invasion of the United States? On the ground of need, therefore, it is the Cuban who has the stronger case.

But need is not morality. Let us not do unto others what we would not have them do unto us. It is a negative statement of the rule, to be sure, but it is one that is apposite.

We move in a retrograde direction when we substitute for this rule the totalitarian slogan, the cry of the kaisers and the dictators of our century, that might makes right. Is this really the position of The New York Times?

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New York, May 14, 1964.

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